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Strategic Connections Resulting in Unique Solutions

Chair's Corner



As we enter into a new Fiscal Year, our area has many challenges. I reflect on a statement in my last month's newsletter article, "...our FEB is a progressive and

collaborative organization that brings Federal agencies together in many formats to share valuable information during changing times." Little did any of us know how much would be changing!

I believe the value of our Houston Federal Executive Board was illustrated just prior and through the duration of Hurricane Harvey. The information flow from City, County, State and Federal government resources to assist us personally and to assist our federal workforce was expeditious and valuable. During a time when our employees are overwhelmed and experiencing loss, it helps when leadership can share information to make their difficult journey a bit smoother. And the information to access services and other resources that help in the recovery process is valuable. I

know our Executive Director received comments from many of you on how you appreciated the information received.

Through this experience, our Executive Director has added the caption "Strategic Connections Resulting in Unique Solutions" to our newsletter. I'm thinking it's pretty descriptive of what we experienced last month and continue to experience!

We convened our first meeting of the **Public Affairs Committee** in September. The meeting was instrumental in federal employees in this specific career field or area of responsibility to meet each other and share best practices. We've set up a regular meeting schedule which will be Nov 21st, Jan 16th, and every other month on the third Tuesday, beginning at 10:00 a.m.

I ask your continued support of our FEB; your efforts are the key to our success in Houston!

Tim Jeffcoat, Chairman

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3 STEPS WHEN GOOD INTENTIONS BLOW UP

Every leader knows what it's like to saddle up and ride into a hurricane of personal attack.

Storms are tipping points for success or failure.

The issue isn't the storm, it's how you deal with it.

Reputations are formed and solidified in storms.

When good intentions blow up:

You try to serve well and make things better, but things get worse. People doubt your good intentions and complain about your performance.

It stings when people speak evil of the good you're trying to accomplish. Complaints go up. Encouragement goes down.

Good intentions aren't enough.

Temptation:

You'll be tempted to pull up and turn away when you encounter personal storms. But pulling back in storms is deadly for leaders.

Don't shoot yourself in the foot when good intentions blow up in your face.

Suppose you're trying to encourage everyone on the team, but some feel

overlooked. Others complain that you're playing favorites. It stings.

You might isolate yourself. Worse yet, resentment might set in. You pull back from encouraging anyone. You think,

"Why bother? You're damned if you do and damned if you don't."

Ride into the storm:

Ride into the storm when team

members speak evil of your good. Don't pull up or turn away.

The turbulence you avoid finds you. Don't let hurt feelings defeat you.

Step 1: Lean in. "Oh, I'm sorry you feel that way." Apologize, even if you didn't intend harm.

Step 2: Declare good intentions. "I'm committed to encourage people." Don't hide. Don't make excuses.

Step 3: Invite involvement. "What suggestions do have that would help me better express my commitment to encourage people?" Invite complainers/attackers to help you make things better.



<https://leadershipfreak.blog/2017/08/16/3-steps-when-good-intentions-blow-up/>

Five Ways Smart People Beat Stress

By Dr. Travis Bradberry, co-author of *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, and cofounder of TalentSmart

There are two kinds of people in this world: those who believe they can make things happen and those who believe things happen to them.



The first group are convinced that the outcome of their lives and careers is more or less in their own hands, and they wouldn't have it any other way.

The second group take more of a Forrest Gump approach—they sit around and wait for the bus to take them somewhere.

University of Florida psychologist Tim Judge and his colleagues have shown overwhelmingly that people who feel that they control the events in their lives (more than the events control them) and are confident in their abilities end up doing better on nearly every important measure of work performance.

In Judge's studies, these individuals—we'll call them "the Empowered"—were found to do the following:

1. Sell more than other employees do
2. Give better customer service
3. Adjust better to new assignments
4. Take home an average of 50 to 150% more in annual income

In Good Times And Bad

Of course, when good times are rolling, nearly all of us believe we have the world by the tail. What makes the Empowered in Tim Judge's studies special—whether they work the shop floor or in the C-suite—is that they don't get overwhelmed when the going gets tough.

Just like you, the Empowered feel intense stress and anxiety when hard times strike, but they use this anxiety differently. Since the Empowered believe that they have control over the outcomes in their lives, their anxiety fuels passion instead of pity, drive in lieu of despair, and tenacity over trepidation.

Whether the Empowered find themselves presiding over a division with tanking revenues, on the receiving end of a scathing performance review, or

staring yet another job-hunting rejection in the face, they refuse to wave the white flag. They redouble their efforts.

Here's How It Works

The empowered outperform everyone else because the ability to manage your emotions and remain calm under pressure has a direct link to your performance. [TalentSmart](#) has conducted research with more than a million people, and we've found that 90% of top performers are skilled at managing their emotions in times of stress in order to remain calm and in control.

Anxiety is an absolutely necessary emotion. Our brains are hard-wired such that it's difficult to take action until we feel some level of anxiety (also called stress). In fact, performance peaks under the heightened activation that comes with moderate levels of anxiety.

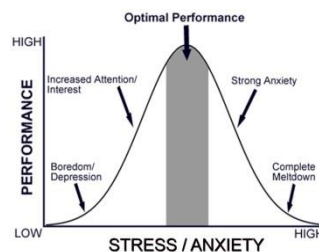
The trick is to manage your stress/anxiety and keep it within optimal levels in order to achieve top performance.

We all know that living under stressful conditions has serious physical and emotional consequences. So why do we have so much trouble taking action to reduce our stress levels and improve our lives? Researchers at Yale have the answer. They found that intense stress actually reduces the volume of gray matter in the areas of the brain responsible for self-control.

As you lose self-control, you lose your ability to cope with stress. It becomes harder for you to keep yourself out of stressful situations, and you're more likely to create them for yourself (such as by overreacting to people). The Yale

research shows us why so many people get sucked into progressive rounds of greater and greater stress until they completely burn out (or worse).

Dwindling self-control is particularly scary when you consider that stress affects physiological functions in the brain, contributing to chronic diseases like hypertension and diabetes. And stress doesn't stop there—it's linked to depression, obesity, and decreased cognitive performance.



Here's How You Do It

If you don't have the tools in place to keep your anxiety in check when it comes on strong, you'll never realize your full potential.

You can get better at managing the anxiety you inevitably feel when facing difficult and uncertain situations. You just need to follow the steps that successful and empowered people take to keep their anxiety from taking over.

The key thing to understand before getting started is that you are indeed facing uncertainty—the outcome of your future has not been decided. It's up to you to develop the beliefs and mental toughness that will make you one of the Empowered.

Step 1: Expect and Prepare for Change

People change and businesses go through ebbs and flows. It's a fact that even the Empowered in Judge's study can't control. They've found themselves out of work. Their companies have fallen on tough times. The difference is that they believe they are fully capable of dealing with changes and making something positive happen.

In other words, they are mentally prepared for change—and you can be too.

If you don't anticipate change naturally, you need to set aside some time regularly—either every week or every other week—to create a list of important changes that you think could *possibly* happen. The purpose of this task is not to predict every change you'll face. Rather, it will open your mind to change and sharpen your ability to spot and respond to impending changes. Even if the events on your lists never happen, the practice of anticipating and preparing for change will give you a greater sense of command over your future.

Step 2: Focus on Your Freedoms, Not Your Limitations

We've all had the old mantra *life isn't fair* beaten into our brains since we were young. This mantra is a voice of despair, anxiety, and passive inaction. While it's true that we sometimes have limited ability to stop negative events from occurring, we are always free to choose our response.

On your list of possible changes from step one, jot down all of the positive ways in which you can take action and respond to each change. You'll

surprise yourself with how much control you can wield in response to seemingly uncontrollable circumstances.

Step 3: Re-write Your Script

Step three is going to be the hardest because it requires you to change the mode of thinking that you've grown accustomed to. Over time, we all develop mental scripts that run through our heads and influence how we feel about our circumstances and what we do in response to them. These scripts go so far as to tell us what to say and how to act in different situations.

In order to be empowered, you'll need to rewrite your script.

To do this, recall a tough time you went through recently. What was it you *believed* about your circumstances that prevented you from making the most of your situation or responding more effectively?

Write this script down, and label it your *hard-luck* script.

Since hindsight is 20/20, go ahead and write a more effective and empowered mental script that you wish you had followed next to it. This is the *empowered* script you will use to replace your *hard-luck* script.

File these away so that you can pull them out and study them whenever you are facing stress or strong anxiety. When you do pull your scripts out, compare your present thinking to your *hard-luck* and *empowered* scripts. This will keep you honest and enable you to adjust your thinking so that you're operating from an *empowered* script.

These periodic reminders will eventually rewrite your scripts completely, enabling you to operate from an *empowered* script at all times.

Step 4: Spot and Stop Negative Self-Talk

A big step in managing stress and anxiety involves stopping negative self-talk in its tracks. The more you ruminate on negative thoughts, the more power you give them.

Most of our negative thoughts are just that—thoughts, not facts.

When you find yourself believing the negative and pessimistic things your inner voice says, it's time to stop and write them down. Literally stop what you're doing, and write down what you're

Five Ways Smart People Beat Stress (cont'd)

thinking. Once you've taken a moment to slow down the negative momentum of your thoughts, you will be more rational and clear-headed in evaluating their veracity.

You can bet that your statements aren't true any time you use words like "never," "worst," or "ever." If your statements still look like facts once they're on paper, take them to a friend or colleague you trust and see if he or she agrees with you. Then the truth will surely come out.

When it feels like something always or never happens, this is just your brain's natural threat tendency inflating the perceived frequency or severity of an event. Identifying and labeling your thoughts as thoughts by separating them from the facts will help you escape the cycle of negativity and anxiety and move toward a positive new outlook.

Step 5: Count Your Blessings

Taking time to contemplate what you're grateful for isn't merely the "right" thing to do; it also lessens anxiety because it reduces the stress hormone cortisol by 23%.

Research conducted at the University of California, Davis, found that people who worked daily to cultivate an attitude of gratitude experienced improved mood, energy and substantially less anxiety due to lower cortisol levels.

Bringing It All Together

Overwhelming anxiety and empowerment are mutually exclusive. Any time you are overcome with enough stress/anxiety to limit your performance, just follow the five steps above to empower yourself and regain control.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/five-ways-smart-people-beat-stress-dr-travis-bradberry>

HOW LEADERS CAN THRIVE IN A 'DISTRIBUTED EVERYTHING' WORLD

During the next 10 years, humanity will experience an explosive connectivity and asymmetric upheaval. Very little will remain constant in the new world – technology, employment hierarchy, monetary systems. That includes leaders and organizations. In the future of amplified digital connectivity, the speed, frequency, and scope of change will be dramatically different.

Anything that can be distributed will be distributed. "How will this affect you?"

Ten years from now:

Ten years from now, you could be a leader in a distributed organization. It will have no center, it will grow from the edges, and it won't be controllable. Hierarchies will come and go in shape-shifting forms resembling a swirl. Rock-star leaders will be rare. In our increasingly VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) world, simple will be great, but simplistic will be dangerous. "How do you thrive?"

Grow into a team of networked leadership:

Inner Strength and Grounding

People who do not possess an inner sense of strength will be more shocked by external disruptions. Most companies now offer mindfulness training and that is great for some people, but there are no magic means to be grounded in the face of the VUCA World.

Leaders must find an approach that works for them, including exercise, sleep, and mental focus.

Bio-Empathy

Bio-empathy involves learning the principles of nature and applying them to yourself to develop your body, mind, and leadership style. Nature works in cycles, not straight lines. Nature is loaded with dilemmas, not just problems leaders can solve.

Quiet Transparency

The ability to be open and transparent about what matters to you, without advertising yourself. Clarity of direction will be rewarded in this future, but certainty will be punished.

The disruptions of the next decade will be beyond what most leaders are equipped to handle. They will be susceptible to simplistic solutions.

Provide enough clarity to organizations to make disruption tolerable, even motivational.

1. Be explicit about where they're going, but flexible about how to get there.
2. Avoid judging too soon (the classic mistake of knee-jerk problem solvers), but realize that deciding too late can be even more dangerous.
3. Avoid judging too soon (the classic mistake of knee-jerk problem solvers), but realize that deciding too late can be even more dangerous.

<https://leadershipfreak.blog/2017/08/30/how-leaders-can-thrive-in-a-distributed-everything-world/>

PEOPLE CAN'T SEE YOUR HEART WHEN YOU'RE LOST IN YOUR HEAD

I can *not* notice people. I want to notice, but I'm easily distracted.

People can't see your heart, when you're lost in your head.

It doesn't matter if you want to notice people. It only matters that you do.

Distraction blocks interaction.

I walk around distracted by a million things – what's next, problems, opportunities, and performance, to name a few. I'm contemplating a coaching client's concerns or the next presentation.

Remember you matter.

It's easy to forget that people watch leaders. A frown on your face signals problems to the team. You may not mean to be a downer, but a nagging frown drags others down.

It ain't hard, but it's important.

People talk about simple things like smiling when they describe how leaders might improve their leadership.

You object that you're not good at smiling. That's so sad.

Bad is stronger than good. You need at least three smiles to overcome the negative impact of one frown. You're in the hole baby. You better get smiling.

3 tips for frowning leaders to get their smile on.

1. Tell yourself you like people.

Think of something you like about

the person in front of you. *If you don't like people, get out of leadership.*

2. Find a positive thing to believe in. What positive thing might you believe about others on the

team?

3. Admire a strength. When you walk up to someone, think about something you admire about them.



A smile that creates wrinkles around your eyes indicates that you notice positive things.

7 small things that make a positive difference.

1. Smile.
2. Show interest. "How are the kids?"
3. Pat on the back.
4. Bring coffee for the team.
5. Celebrate progress and hard work.
6. Sing happy birthday.
7. Say thank you. (A smile and a little eye contact takes 'thank you' to a whole new level.)

<https://leadershipfreak.blog/2017/08/18/people-cant-see-your-heart-when-youre-lost-in-your-head/>

HOW TO BE TOUGH WHEN YOU PREFER BEING KIND

Stress increases when leaders can't bring kind and tough together.

Kind without tough makes you a pushover.

Tough without kind makes you a jerk.

Accountability is candy to some leaders.

It's easy for them to say, "No." They have no problem holding people's feet to the fire. But you aren't one of them.

Extremes:

Some leaders choose kindness and neglect toughness. They bring coffee for the staff. They exchange pleasantries and tell jokes. They're always affirming. But they avoid tough situations. They can't say, "No."

Some leaders choose toughness and neglect kindness. They avoid social pleasantries. They stand aloof because it's easy, safe, and less confusing.

Lead with kindness:

Let kindness be your first step toward people. Don't begin with toughness. Be pleasant, upbeat, curious, and affirming. But what if some take advantage of kindness?

They ask for special exemptions. Worse yet, they grant themselves special privileges.

What if the tough side of leadership is hard for you?

How to say no when you prefer saying yes:

You don't have to choose between kind or tough. Don't be Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

When it's time to be tough, do it with



kindness.

Declare your intentions and say no with kindness.

1. I want to say yes, but this time I have to say no.
2. I work to be fair with everyone. I'd love to make an exception, but I can't.
3. I wish I could say yes, but I have to say no.
4. It's hard for me to say no, but this time I have to.

Elevate your leadership by bringing kindness and toughness together.

<https://leadershipfreak.blog/2017/09/06/how-to-be-tough-when-you-prefer-being-kind/>

Human Lessons from Hurricane Harvey

Written by LeAnn Jenkins, Executive Director of Oklahoma FEB and Houston FEB.

I saw the post below on what was learned from Katrina and realized those are the SAME lessons we learned from the Oklahoma City Bombing, as well as the historic tornadoes of 1999 and 2013. While we know that every disaster drives a different response, the human response is almost the same. In addition to the bullet points of Jerry, I wanted to add a few of my own observations regarding the Human Condition during Hurricane Harvey:

- **First Rescue Workers on the scene are fellow victims of the same disaster.** *Neighbors were rescuing neighbors and assisting those up and down the street who were elderly or those with small children. If they had a boat, they drained it and used it to get people out.*
- **Leaders don't always wear a suit or uniform.** *It may be a 15 year old who shows up with his fishing rig and a friend, braving the fast water from daylight until after dark. Taking load after load of families to dry land; unload, repeat.*
- **Those who give the most have also lost and have little to give.** *Local residents brought what they could to shelters and responded to requests for needed items for the various shelters in the area: diapers, toys, etc.*
- **Disasters reveal the best and worst of the Human condition.** *People came from surrounding areas to help....this is resiliency. The community came together for a common purpose, in a big way. Others posed as ICE Officers telling people to evacuate so they could loot their homes; there were those who took advantage of the situation, but once they were reported for price-gouging, they reduced their price to avoid the hefty fines; and don't get me started on those offering false benefits.*
- **Communication is important—in MANY forms—and needs to be repeated.** *With society so attuned and connected to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other forms of social media, we found that false information was rampant. Leaders are considered to be compassionate to provide their workforce with the information they need. It's not a "one and done" kind of situation; information to assist them in recovery needs to be repeated; these residents are overwhelmed and have more to handle than they are equipped and will most likely not remember all the info you provide unless it is something they need "right now".*

Remember What We Learned

Wherever I go and with whoever I'm working, I'm always interested in discovering what leadership lessons are to be learned and how they can be applied to improve our responses in the future.

12 years ago, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, some very important leadership principles were shared with me by my Federal clients. I want to give you a list, because these insights provide a template for action that goes well beyond a singular response to a natural disaster. These leadership practices are applicable in virtually any leadership endeavor. I hope you find a way to apply them in your everyday work.

And I hope you are praying for and supporting the efforts along the Gulf Coast in the midst and wake of Hurricane Harvey.

Leadership Lessons Learned from Katrina

- *It's more important to focus on helping people than pointing fingers*
- *Those with a take charge attitude accomplished the most (made the biggest impact)*
- *A clear voice from the top is needed ... communicate ... communicate ... communicate*
- *People will respond to a need if given the opportunity*
- *We must be aware of how people react (especially to a traumatic incident) to truly help them*
- *Pondering decisions, when decisive action is needed, leads to frustration*
- *Lots of small groups getting things done is the best way to get a lot done*
- *Admit failures, where necessary, and move forward*

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